



Hepatitis Update

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Hepatitis Update is brought to you by the Division of Disease Control & Health Protection, Bureau of Communicable Diseases, HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis Section at the Florida Department of Health.

If you would like to submit an article along with photos, email the editor at:

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Welcome Dr. Likos

Anna Marie Likos, MD, MPH, is the new director for the Division of Disease Control and Health Protection at the Florida Department of Health. Dr. Likos provides oversight for the Bureaus of Communicable Diseases, Environmental Health and Epidemiology. She brings to the position a strong background in public health, both nationally and internationally.

Dr. Likos worked with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) beginning in 2003 when she became an Epidemic Intelligence Service Officer (EIS) with the Poxvirus Program.

She has also worked in several other CDC positions, including time spent as a medical epidemiologist. She has worked in various CDC programs, including the Influenza Branch, Division of Viral and Rickettsial Diseases (DVRD), the Global AIDS Program Office in both Haiti and Cote d'Ivoire, and the Field Training Program in Morocco. Most recently, Dr. Likos provided technical assistance to countries in the World Health Organization *Regional Office for Africa (WHO/AFRO)* regarding polio eradication activities.

Dr. Likos received her medical degree from the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center and her Master of Public Health (International Health) from Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health. She completed a residency in Internal Medicine-Primary Care at Yale New Haven Hospital as well as a residency in preventive medicine at Johns Hopkins.



Dr. Likos



Who is this Florida Department of Health Employee of the Year? Find out on page 7.

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Real Health Issues: Real Health Solutions

Viral Hepatitis Prevention Coordinators' National Meeting

By Phil Reichert

A biennial meeting of the viral hepatitis prevention coordinators (VHPC) was held in Washington, DC October 23-25. The meeting was sponsored by the National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors (NASTAD), an organization that advocates on behalf of HIV and hepatitis programs across the United States. I was given the opportunity to facilitate and present at one of the meeting breakout sessions that dealt with testing baby boomers born from 1945-1965 for hepatitis C.



Phil Reichert

The overwhelming talk of the meeting revolved around the upcoming medications for hepatitis C (HCV) treatment that will increase sustained viral response (SVR) in treated individuals from around 65-70 percent up to nearly 100 percent. SVR is tantamount to a cure for the disease, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director of the Division of Viral Hepatitis, Dr. John Ward. And, most importantly, says Ward, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) should approve several new drugs within the next year or so that will eliminate the need for pegylated interferon. The current standard of care for hepatitis C calls for weekly injections of interferon. This medication causes severe side effects in most of the individuals who take it. With the new medications on the horizon, there will not only be some oral-only options, but the "cure" rate, or SVR, will approach 100 percent.

Another major discussion at the meeting was about the ability to provide medical homes in the future for people infected with hepatitis C who have little or no health insurance.

Here are a few more highlights from the meeting: Dr. Ron Valdeserri, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Health at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), commented that they are currently updating the 2011 document, *The Viral Hepatitis Action Plan*, to provide programmatic guidance on viral hepatitis prevention through 2016.

Dr. Elinore McCance-Katz, Chief Medical Officer for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), said that 14-36 percent of people in the US who abuse alcohol are infected with hepatitis C. And, 19.6 percent of individuals in the US with serious mental illness have hepatitis C. She stated that we will need to better address HCV in these populations.

Another topic in several presentations was the importance of good, consistent surveillance. We have always heard the public health mantra, "surveillance drives the program." Accurate reporting of viral hepatitis into a common surveillance system will guide prevention efforts and help us to effectively allocate our scarce resources.

It was stated by several presenters that screening and testing individuals at risk is a priority. The 2012 CDC release of guidance about testing all Americans born from 1945-1965 drove several discussions on how to accomplish this. The state of New York passed a law this year that all hospitals and doctors' offices must offer hepatitis C testing to the baby boomer cohort (those born during that time period). The law goes into effect January 1, 2014. In most states, doctors are being educated to offer hepatitis C testing. And, individuals born during that time period are being educated to ask their health care givers for a test.

Jon Zibbell, from the CDC Division of Viral Hepatitis, talked about how HCV can survive in the "dead space" between the plunger and the needle of a syringe for up to 63 days. This presents a real problem for persons who inject drugs (PWID). In general, HCV can survive on a surface outside the body for about 14 days. Zibbell said that up to 70 percent of PWID are infected with HCV because this population often shares needles and syringes.

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National Meeting continued...

Representative Hank Johnson, from Georgia, spoke at the meeting about his bout with hepatitis C and going through the treatment four times before he had a SVR. Representative Johnson has co-sponsored the hepatitis testing bills introduced in the House of Representatives over the past few years.

Finally, Julie Scofield, the Executive Director of NASTAD, talked about NASTAD priorities in the coming years. Her agency plans to continue advocating for additional funding to the states for their VHPCs and for their state and local viral hepatitis prevention programs. Additionally, NASTAD plans to address health inequities in communities of color, provide technical assistance for better health in drug users and work to promote fair pricing of new medications as they come into the marketplace so everyone who needs them can afford them.

For slide presentations and information about this NASTAD National Technical Assistance meeting, go to this link: <http://www.nastad.org/resources.aspx>

Looking east on Pennsylvania Avenue



Representative Hank Johnson

Florida Helps Set Another Guinness World Record

By Pam Langford, HEALS of the South

Last year we set a Guinness World Record on World Hepatitis Day (WHD). This year we broke that record!

The title was awarded for having the most people perform the “see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil” actions in 24 hours at multiple venues around the world. Each record attempt took place on July 28th. The record for 2012 was 12,588. That figure was more than doubled in 2013 with a total of 26,204 participants!

The “see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil” WHD theme relates to a proverb known as the three wise monkeys. There are many meanings attached to the proverb, but mostly it is used to refer to those who deal with problems by refusing to acknowledge them. This theme was chosen to highlight that around the world hepatitis is often ignored.



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Human Breast Milk Inactivates Hepatitis C Virus Infectivity

By Will Boggs, MD, Reuters Health

A new study shows why breastfeeding is generally safe even when mothers are infected with the hepatitis C virus (HCV). The reason is that human breast milk inactivates HCV infectivity by disrupting its envelope, researchers from Germany have found.

"This study provides a novel mechanism for the protective properties of human mother's milk against HCV," Dr. Eike Steinmann from the TWINCORE Center for Experimental and Clinical Infection Research in Hannover told Reuters Health. "A new finding is that lipases in human milk generate free fatty acids that damage the viral envelope and render them non-infectious."

In an editorial published in *The Journal of Infectious Diseases*, Dr. Ravi Jhaveri from the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill says, "The results provide a plausible explanation for why breastfeeding is not a risk factor for HCV transmission. This is reassuring for us as practitioners when we counsel our HCV patients that it is safe for them to breastfeed."

Using breast milk from healthy HCV-negative women, the research team found that even short preincubation periods of HCV in the milk brought consistent reductions of HCV infectivity by 2 to 3 orders of magnitude.

The breast milk inactivated HCV infectivity independent of the viral genotype, and antiviral activity was concentration dependent. Concentrations between four percent and six percent milk were sufficient to reduce HCV infectivity, whereas higher dilutions abolished the antiviral effect.

Breast milk efficiently inactivates HCV in vitro and neither the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) nor the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases (AASLD) argues against breastfeeding by HCV infected women unless they have cracked or bleeding nipples," Dr. Steinmann concluded.

FAMU Health Fair

By April Crowley

Florida A&M University (FAMU) held their annual Homecoming Health and Safety Day on Tuesday, October 15th. The event was open to the public, and offered an opportunity for students, faculty, staff and members of the community to become informed and empowered to take charge of their health.

Pam and Pat from HEALS of the South (Hepatitis Education, Awareness and Liver Support), a non-profit organization in Tallahassee, were among the community partners who shared valuable health promotion and disease prevention information.

They provided educational materials on hepatitis risk factors, testing, vaccination, treatment options, support groups—basically everything you've always wanted to know about viral hepatitis, but were afraid to ask.

Pam is an active advocate for hepatitis C (HCV). For more information, visit her website at: www.HEALSoftheSouth.org



Pam, left, and Pat

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Bay County QI

By Donna Wheeler



Donna Wheeler

October was a busy month for Quality Improvement (QI) visits. I traveled to three different county health departments (CHDs). One of those was Bay County, where I learned a lot about their Hepatitis Prevention Team. Talk about enthusiastic and engaged! Through careful planning, this CHD has worked hard to identify gaps in the more common target populations, e.g., Native Americans, the Asian-descent community, homeless families with children, retired veterans and migrant workers.

Eric Moncada is a new full-time bi-lingual staff member who focuses on educational and outreach activities. He is busy conducting face-to-face private provider training, as well as providing presentations in jails, and at community health events and various local non-profit organizations.

Ethnic specific and culturally appropriate materials are on-hand and kept in good supply in an organized manner. Interpreters are utilized due to the growing Vietnamese population. Information and literature are mailed or provided to the general public and clients upon request.

Laura McKinney, Public Health Services Manager, and Tracy Adams, Senior Community Health Nurse Supervisor, work closely with Michael Fluharty, Nursing Program Specialist, and his epidemiology team by regularly reviewing monthly data in addition to on-line resources. This enables them to find trends and determine ethnic focus in efforts to reduce hepatitis morbidity.

Well attended bimonthly community-wide meetings are conducted to discuss and educate attendees on a myriad of emerging issues including hepatitis. Internal weekly nursing staff meetings include hepatitis updates. Hepatitis prevention issues are discussed and covered in the mandatory annual blood borne pathogens class. Good communication is evident in all clinics!



Left to right: Laura McKinney, Rick Vitale, Eric Moncada (seated) and Tracy Adams.

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CDC Vaccine Project on Track in Second Year

By Cindy Kruty



Cindy Kruty

Since April 2013, there have been six county health departments within the state that participate in a hepatitis B vaccine grant project funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The Departments of Health in Clay, Duval, Orange, Miami-Dade, Polk and Sarasota counties are reaching out to individuals who are at-risk of contracting hepatitis B and attempting to appropriately risk assess, vaccinate and educate them.

Monthly conference calls are held with the six counties to report progress and difficulties they have encountered. The calls also enable local staff to share specific strategies that make their vaccine project especially successful. In addition, in October 2013, Tallahassee staff began site visits to participating local health departments. The purpose of these visits is to provide technical assistance and training to the local staff responsible for the vaccinations and reporting. During the visits, we highlight their successes and assist with any opportunities to improve on their struggles.

The grant allocates 13,420 total doses of hepatitis B vaccine to be used throughout the two-year funded project. Monroe County will be added during the final year of this vaccine project. Monroe plans to begin vaccinating in the very near future.

From April 1st through September 30th, the six health departments provided 2,077 hepatitis B vaccines as a result of this endeavor. We anticipate this hepatitis B vaccine project will continue to succeed at reaching and vaccinating eligible adults throughout the state who may not have had previous access to such services.

Serial Infectors with Hepatitis C

By Phil Reichert

David Kwiatkowski, a radiology technician at Exeter Hospital in New Hampshire, removed syringes meant for patients that were pre-filled with fentanyl (a powerful narcotic painkiller), injected himself, and then refilled those syringes with saline. Kwiatkowski was infected with hepatitis C, and because of his neglect and reuse of the needles on patients, he exposed thousands of individuals in New Hampshire, as well as individuals in seven other states. And, he infected more than 45 people with the disease. He was arrested and arraigned for tampering with needles. The 34-year-old Kwiatkowski has been called a "serial infector."

Kwiatkowski worked for an agency that sent health care workers to hospitals and clinics all over the country. Over a period of about four years, he worked in several hospitals in eight states (Arizona, Georgia, Kansas, Maryland, Michigan, New York and Pennsylvania), including New Hampshire. Each state launched investigations and offered hepatitis C testing to patients who may have come in contact with Kwiatkowski.

In August of 2013, Kwiatkowski pled guilty to seven counts of tampering with a consumer product and seven counts of obtaining controlled substances by fraud. He faces between 30 and 40 years in prison. Without the plea deal, he faced up to 100 years.

In 2010, in Denver, Colorado, Kristen D. Parker, who was 27 years old at that time, was sentenced to 30 years in prison for stealing syringes filled with narcotics and practicing much the same behavior as Kwiatkowski. She, too, was a health care worker who had access to narcotics-filled syringes, injected herself and left the syringes to be used on patients. Her needle-swapping infected at least 18 patients.

In 2012, Steven Beumel, 49, of Jacksonville, Florida, a hepatitis C infected health care worker, was sentenced to 30 years in prison for stealing syringes with painkillers and replacing them with saline. The contaminated syringes were then used on patients. Like Kwiatkowski, he was a radiology technician. After testing thousands of patients with whom Beumel may have had contact, it was determined that he infected at least two, one of whom died.

Seminole County QI

By April Crowley

On October 8, 2013, Donna Wheeler and I went to the Florida Department of Health in Seminole County for a QI visit. I'm always amazed at how much county health departments (CHDs) accomplish when it comes to hepatitis prevention. These trips constantly reaffirm my appreciation and respect for public health.

In Seminole County, we met with the following staff: Donna Walsh, Director of Community Health; Enid Santiago-Cruz, Hepatitis Prevention Program Coordinator; Dr. Greg Danyluk, Epidemiology (EPI) Manager; and Senior Community Health Nurses, Gladys Fernando and Peggy Booth.

I have known Enid Santiago-Cruz for several years and have always admired her work ethic. Enid works closely with internal staff at the CHD and community organizations to maximize outreach planning and opportunities. Her enthusiasm and commitment are so encouraging. In fact, for her endeavors, Enid was named "Employee of the Year" for 2012.

Enid is an involved member of public health-related organizations outside the Florida Department of Health in their community service efforts. She also uses the memberships as a means of networking with other public health professionals. One example is the Café Latino of Central Florida Coalition comprising Osceola, Seminole and Lake Counties. Although the organization is chartered to focus on HIV/AIDS, Enid goes the extra mile and brings in the hepatitis prevention factor.

October was full of activity for Enid with the observance of *National Latino AIDS Awareness Day (NLAAD)* on October 15th. The theme this year was "Commit to Speak," an opportunity for individuals and organizations to speak out and raise awareness of the continuing burden of HIV/AIDS among Hispanics/Latinos.

Café Latino of Central Florida hosted three *Commit to Speak* health fairs at various Walgreen pharmacy locations in Kissimmee, Orlando and Sanford. And, of course, Enid participated in every one of these activities. The *Commit to Speak* events offered free screenings for HIV, STD, hepatitis, and glucose. Hepatitis vaccines were also provided.

Enid also serves on the Florida Viral Hepatitis Council and has provided valuable input into the Hepatitis Prevention Comprehensive Plan.

In the event of any disease outbreak (not just hepatitis), Enid works closely with the EPI staff and community health nurses.

Good communications and relationships have been fostered within all the CHD sections and surrounding county health departments.



Left to right: Donna Walsh, Peggy Booth, Gladys Fernando, Greg Danyluk and Enid Santiago-Cruz

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Hepatitis Program Says Goodbye to Dena Hall

By April Crowley

After working for 33 years in state government, Cyndena (Dena) Hall is hanging up her hat and retiring. Her last day will be January 2, 2014.

Dena joined the Hepatitis Prevention Program in 2007 as the Research and Surveillance Coordinator. She previously worked for ten years in the Bureau of HIV/AIDS' AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP) as the state program consultant. Prior to that, she was employed for 12 years with the Developmental Services Program, now the Agency for Persons With Disabilities.

Dena is a 1980 graduate of Stetson University in Deland, Florida, with a B.A. in Social Science. She grew up learning about public health and hepatitis A when her father, Harry Hall, Director of Environmental Health, investigated hepatitis A outbreaks for what was then known as the Pinellas County Public Health Unit. Little did she know that one day she would work in a hepatitis prevention program.



Russ and Dena

Dena recently married the love of her life, Russ Grubbs. They are the proud parents of two dogs, three cats and two parrots. When asked what she plans to do in retirement, Dena quoted country singer Tom T. Hall (no known relation to Dena Hall): "When you retire, it's a place in life, a part of the journey. You just don't quit work, you develop an attitude where you can do what you please." She added: "What pleases me now is to spend time with Russ, garden, bake, craft, take care of my animals, and perhaps find some volunteer work I can enjoy later on. It's been an interesting ride these past 33 years."

On a personal note, I want to share a story that shows what a big and compassionate heart Dena has. In 2009, my cat, Elvis, was very sick. It was only a matter of a days before he would be put to sleep. Needless to say, I was devastated. Dena immediately called her father and asked him to build a casket for Elvis. She and Russ drove to Perry (where her retired parents live), picked up the casket and delivered it to my home in Tallahassee on that fateful day.

The cat casket was beautiful—truly a work of art. It was made out of wood that Mr. Hall painted blue with purple raised letters that spelled "Elvis." The inside was lined with satin. Dena also gave me a concrete figurine of a sleeping cat with wings so there would be a marker for his grave. I will never forget that incredible act of kindness.



Left to right: Dena with her parents, Shirley and Harry Hall

So, it is with heavy hearts that the Hepatitis Prevention Program bids adieu to Dena. You are one of a kind, and will be remembered for the things that you did here. Thanks for your years of hard work and dedication. Congratulations on your retirement!



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Hillsborough QI

By Donna Wheeler

After a QI visit to Seminole County, April Crowley and I headed to Tampa to visit the Florida Department of Health in Hillsborough County on October 9th. Our first stop was the main location on Kennedy Boulevard. We met with several of the staff, including Warren McDougal and Patrick Rodriguez from Epidemiology.



The Hargrett Building

The Epi team has a close working relationship with hepatitis support groups where educational information is distributed. Epidemiology works with providers and immunization staff to ensure at-risk clients are vaccinated. Clients are usually referred to the Immunization and Refugee Program for vaccinations. However, immediate plans are to offer the first dose of vaccine in the STD clinic with follow up in Immunization.

The CHD believes offering clients the first dose of vaccine in the STD clinic and scheduling clients for subsequent doses with Immunization will enhance completion rates. The Specialty Care Clinic and TB Clinic also offer hepatitis testing. The TB Clinic offers vaccinations as well.

Our next stop was to the Hargrett Building on East 26th Avenue where Immunization and Refugee Health are located. The staff at this building were in the process of moving to a new location. But, that did not stop them from being very welcoming and eager to talk about their hepatitis prevention efforts.

The entire health department is actively involved in the community by facilitating and participating in outreach events. Hepatitis prevention education is frequently included in community infectious disease presentations.



Left to right: Staff from the Immunization and Refugee Health Program: Kevin Argote, Office Operations Manager; Adriene James, Nursing Program Specialist; Robyn Pasto, Program Manager; and Sergio Rivera, Health Services Representative.

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